

REPORT to PARENTS

Making Sense of Vaccinations

It can seem like nothing is as heartbreaking as listening to your child cry when it's time to get a "shot." But, unless they are properly vaccinated, children can come down with diseases that are much more devastating—and potentially life threatening. Not only that, but childhood vaccines actually help you as well, by lowering the risk that your family, friends, neighbors, and others in the community will contract a serious but preventable disease.

Do you know all you need to know about your children's vaccinations? Are they up-to-date? Are there new vaccinations that your children could benefit from? Are there any vaccines that older children need? Here's a quick run-down on vaccination facts, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Institutes of Health.

What vaccines should children have completed before starting school?

By age 6, children should have received all of the following vaccines (given in several doses from birth through age 6):

- Hepatitis B;
- Rotavirus;
- Diphtheria, tetanus, and acellular pertussis (DTaP);
- Haemophilus influenza type b (Hib);
- Pneumococcal;
- Poliovirus;
- Influenza;
- Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR);
- Varicella (chickenpox); and
- Hepatitis A.

What vaccines do children need to receive once they are school age (ages 7-18)?

If a child has completed all of the required childhood vaccinations by age 6, no additional vaccinations are required until age 11, when children should receive the tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis (Tdap) and the meningococcal (MCV4) vaccines. They will continue to need to get booster tetanus shots every 10 years for the rest of their lives. (Make sure your tetanus shot is up to date as well!)



If my child didn't complete all of the early childhood vaccinations, can he/she still get protection against the disease?

Not only can your child receive these vaccines, it is very important that he or she does get them. Although it is always best to follow the recommended schedule for receiving childhood vaccines, your child's doctor can consult the "catch up immunization schedule" published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to make sure your child can be properly immunized for a healthy future.

Are vaccinations safe?

Some children do have reactions to vaccinations, but they are almost always very mild. Clearly, if your child has a serious reaction, such as a very high fever, swelling at the site of the injection, or a widespread rash, it is important to contact your doctor immediately.

Although it's natural to be concerned about the safety of your child's vaccinations, it is important to remember that the consequences of not being vaccinated can be far worse. The infectious diseases that today's childhood vaccinations prevent can cause brain injury, breathing problems, deafness, or paralysis.

These diseases, while rare in America, are still common elsewhere in the world and can be introduced to the United States by travelers to this country. It is essential to protect your child.

What about newly introduced vaccines? How can I know whether my child should receive these vaccinations?

By the time a vaccine has received federal approval, it has been closely tested for its safety and effectiveness. If you have questions about whether a vaccine that has been recommended—but not required—is appropriate for your child, talk to your doctor and make the decision that's best for your child. The meningococcal vaccine is one example of a vaccine that is new to this generation but that promises to pay health benefits for all generations to come.